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## THE STAGE AND SOCIETY.

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SOME thoughts are suggested by the rapidly growing respect and esteem of the world for the art and artists of the stage. Not so many years ago, social laws proscribed the followers of the theatrical calling in most offensive and contemptuous terms. In these present days there is no social eminence to which the serious and earnest artist of the stage may not mount, no circle so exclusive that its gates may not be passed by the player who shall prove personally worthy.

Described in the old English statutes as vagabonds, "such as wake on the night and sleep on the day, and hunt customable taverns and ale-houses, and routs about, and no man wot from whence they came, nor whither they go," the dramatic artist of to-day finds every door open and every hand stretched out in welcome.

What are the moving causes of this lifting up of the theatre and its followers? Are they to be discovered in the devotion of players to the development and dignification of their art, or in the supposititious exaltation of the stage by society personages who have persuaded themselves that, in becoming associated with the drama, they are assisting in its "elevation"?

I think that any serious consideration of this advancement of the profession of acting must bring the conclusion that it has been occasioned purely by the care and thought and increasing power of the actors themselves. No barrier can stand forever before the progress of honest endeavor. It is only by the constant toil which produces development that any of the arts has gone forward, and this applies with particular force to the dramatic art, which, being a combination of all the others, is the most difficult and comprehensive.

It would be a destructive blow to the existence of such a thing as dramatic art, if a social leader, equipped with a pleasing personality, a degree of drawing-room grace and ten lessons in eloqu-

tion, were to gain, as an actress, the approval of thoughtful observers. I do not say that a society leader may not become a dramatic artist. But her progress must be accomplished by the same methods and labors and experiences as those which mark the advancement of the humblest beginner in the ranks.

To most of those who move from the private mansion to the stage, acting seems an easy accomplishment, and theatrical triumphs appear the simple rewards of trivial labors. Thus, your society amateur, with her few lessons and her parlor graces—which are by no means stage graces—starts serenely in at the top, expecting to see herself instantly recognized as a dramatic artist. Sometimes she finds in notoriety a balm for the abrasion of her expectations. But, more generally, she feels that the actors, the newspapers and the general community, have entered into a dark conspiracy to thwart her ambitions and rob the drama of one of its most shining lights. There should be no room on the stage for any man or woman who is not willing to study and work unceasingly not only for individual triumph, but also for the growth and honor of the art of acting. Such persons do not ornament the stage any more than they comprehend its mission or measure its worth. Far from elevating the dramatic art, they retard its progress and bring upon it the reproach of purposeless frivolity.

The task of the dramatic artist is not of a trifling nature. It is the purpose of the player to not merely impersonate the creations of poetic genius, but to illuminate them—to make a picture of the dramatist's fancy. Sculpture, painting, music and poetry are all requirements of the dramatic artist who has the highest aspirations. The temperament must be more or less charged with melody, and there must be not only some knowledge of the arts but a direct sympathetic feeling for all of them. The true dramatic artist must be upon a mental and sympathetic level with the maker of the character he or she is to perform, or the characterization ceases to possess importance as a contribution to the art products of the time.

A difficulty of the players' position is that when we have once made our picture it must remain as it is. We cannot draw a pen through a phrase that proves, upon examination, to have been badly chosen, and we cannot paint out a blemish upon our canvas, retouching the spot at our leisure. When our portraiture once takes form, it is instantly judged for what it is, not what it may

become by revision. The dramatic artist is thus placed at a disadvantage as compared with the workers in other lines of art.

It is a great part of our mission to seek out the utmost dramatic possibilities of compositions that have been framed for the stage and bring them to the light. We can hardly expect to accomplish this task with success until we have, by long study and experience, trained our natural qualities to a knowledge of what dramatic effects really are, and a power to bring them out.

Let me choose, for an example, the "Winter's Tale." When I was preparing for its presentation in London many close readers of Shakespeare were considerably more than doubtful of the result. Professor Max Muller said to me one day: "I do not see what can be made of this work. Viewed from the dramatic standpoint I regard it as not only the least valuable of Shakespeare's plays, but as being almost wholly worthless."

"You must go and see it," I replied.

"I shall do so," he continued, "and if you can convince me that the 'Winter's Tale' is worth the labor and expense you are bestowing upon it, I shall admit that I was completely in error."

He did see the production, and he very heartily admitted that he had been completely deceived as to its value for dramatic purposes. Thus, I hold, that the dramatic artist, by the sustained and tireless exercise of his or her art, may prove of great assistance to the student, who, without knowledge of the stage, must frequently lose sight of the best qualities of dramatic poetry.

The "Winter's Tale," contrary to the expectations of all readers, has proved to be, not only interesting in a literary sense, but highly dramatic in its action, and much more than usually rich in episode. It was in this last quality that the play was most generally thought to be utterly deficient, and the insight of stage experience, training and study was required to make it apparent. The discovery of all the purely dramatic effects in any given work is not possible to the student who is not familiar with the art of acting in its best sense. Indeed, the author himself is frequently ignorant of the complete possibilities of his play. It is only the dramatic artist who can fully enlighten him, and by this enlightenment assist him to the creation of still greater effects.

An instance illustrating the power of the dramatic artist to suggest and bring out the meanings of the author where they have not been apparent to the reader or student, was made known in

the Mounet-Sully production of "Hamlet" at the Theatre Française. It was the most wonderful production of Shakespeare ever known, not merely from the standpoint of splendor and outlay, but as viewed from the point of realistic suggestiveness. All Paris went to see it, and a great many people made the journey from London for the express purpose of witnessing the revival. I confess to having followed it, with eager interest, no less than eight times.

Reference to a single event in the representation will confer an idea of the remarkable skill shown in conveying the illusion intended by the author. In the first place, the curtain went up on a scene in which there was an atmospheric effect so skillfully devised as to suggest most vividly the blue-cold of a winter night in Denmark. For some moments there was silence on the stage, which was deserted. Then there was heard in the distance the clanking sound of a man in armor. The sound approached nearer and nearer, and then a guard appeared upon the scene, beating his hands and blowing his warm breath upon his fingers, in an apparent endeavor to restore his circulation. He crossed the stage without a word and disappeared. He could be heard receding in the distance, and finally came in sight again at the back of the stage.

All this was done before a word was spoken, and it was intended to show just what kind of night it was. In this the action was extremely successful. It brought out, pictorially, the poet's briefly-described conditions surrounding the opening of his play. There might be recalled a number of similar effects which were brought out in this same representation, but this single incident will serve to show the value of the dramatic artist's insight as a help to making clear the author's design, no matter how lightly it may have been touched by the writer.

The knowledge that makes possible this detection of meanings, sometimes written between the lines, comes through the training of the dramatic instinct that is the substructure upon which the actor builds his art. But, in the building, there is untold endeavor, and often bitter disappointment. There is nothing about the progress of a dramatic artist that is at all in the line of carelessness and ease. Every step carries one into more difficult paths, and an accidental triumph is robbed of half its pleasure.

These, at first sight trivial elaborations, to which I have alluded, go to show that the merest trifles in dramatic art are worth the labor involved in their acquirement. And it is only through long and earnest effort, careful training, lofty thought and determined purpose, that the player of to-day has been raised from the shadow of the past, and finds himself no longer a vagabond, but a recognized artist, to whom the world is open.

The possibilities of the art are boundless to those who approach it with the proper motives, spurred by a fitting instinct. Such votaries may be of high or low degree. That matters nothing. But the person who steps upon the stage, from palace or hovel, in pursuit of notoriety or unearned gain, has no right to be admitted to the dramatic profession.

MARY ANDERSON.